

Advertising Sales Agents

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Significant Points

- Overall earnings are higher than average but can vary considerably because they are usually based on a salary plus performance-based commissions and bonuses.
- Pressure to meet monthly sales quotas can be stressful.

Nature of the Work

Advertising sales agents—often referred to as *account executives* or *advertising sales representatives*—sell or solicit advertising, including graphic art, advertising space in publications, custom-made signs, or television and radio advertising time. More than half of all advertising sales agents work in the information sector, mostly for media firms, including television and radio broadcasters, print and Internet publishers, and cable program distributors. Other agents work for firms engaged in direct mail advertising or display and outdoor advertising, such as billboards and signs. Because most revenue for magazines, newspapers, directories, and broadcasters is generated from advertising, advertising sales agents play an important role in their success.

Outside sales agents call on clients and prospects at their place of business. They may have an appointment, or they may practice “cold calling,” arriving without an appointment. *Inside sales agents* work on their employer’s premises and handle sales to customers who walk in or telephone the firm to inquire about advertising. Some also may make telephone sales calls—calling prospects, attempting to sell the media firm’s advertising space or time, and arranging follow-up appointments between interested prospects and outside sales agents. Advertising sales agents should not be confused with *telemarketers*, whose duties are limited solely to soliciting orders for goods or services over the telephone and who work primarily in call centers that provide telemarketing services on contract.

Within the advertising and related services industry, media representative firms sell advertising space or time for media owners, including print and Internet publishers, radio and television stations, and cable systems. Media representative firms maintain offices in major cities and employ their own teams of advertising sales agents. These agents work exclusively with the executives at advertising agencies, called media buyers, who purchase advertising space for their clients. Media representative firms may represent any number of publications and radio or television stations, selling space to advertising agencies with clients who want to initiate a national advertising campaign or place advertisements outside their local market. Sales agents employed in media representation normally do not cultivate new advertisers but maintain contacts with existing advertisers through the advertising agencies. A local television or radio station or publication would have a national sales manager to promote its best interests and coordinate the efforts of all the media representative firms on its behalf.

Local sales agents are employed by local publications or radio and television stations and are responsible for sales in a local territory. For these sales agents, obtaining new accounts is an important part of the job, and they may spend much of their time traveling to and visiting prospective advertisers and current clients. During a sales call, they discuss the client’s advertising needs and suggest how their products and services can meet those needs. A critical part of building a relationship with a client is to find out as much as possible about the client and its products. Sales agents inquire about the client’s current customers, prospective customers, and the geographic area of the target market.

During the first meeting with a client, sales agents gather background information and explain how specific types of advertising will help promote a client’s products or services most effectively. Next, the advertising sales agent prepares an advertising proposal to present to the client. This entails determining the advertising medium to be used, preparing sample advertisements, and providing clients with estimates of the cost of the proposal. Consolidation in the media industries has brought the sale of different types of advertising under one roof. Sales are increasingly made of integrated packages that include advertisements to be placed in print, online, and with a broadcast subsidiary.

After a contract has been established, advertising sales agents serve as the main contact between the client and the firm. They handle communication between the parties and assist the client in developing sample artwork or radio and television spots. They also arrange for commercial taping sessions and may accompany clients to the sessions.

Beyond selling, advertising sales agents have other duties as well. They analyze sales statistics, prepare reports, and handle the scheduling of their appointments and work hours. They read about new and existing products and monitor the sales, prices, and products of their competitors. In many firms, the advertising sales agent handles the drafting of contracts specifying the advertising work to be performed and its cost, as well as the billing and record-keeping for their customers’ accounts—which may include customer service responsibilities such as answering questions or addressing any problems the client may have with the proposal. Sales agents also are responsible for developing sales tools, promotional plans, and media kits, which they use to help make the sale.

Working Conditions

Selling can be stressful work because income and job security depend directly on the agent’s ability to maintain and expand clientele. Companies generally set monthly sales quotas and place considerable pressure on advertising sales agents to meet those quotas. The added stress of rejection places more pressure on the agent.

Many advertising sales agents work more than 40 hours per week. Although the hours are long and often irregular, most have the freedom to determine their own schedule. The Internet and other electronic tools allow agents to do more work from home or while on the road, enabling them to send messages and documents to clients and coworkers, keep up with industry news, and access databases that help them target potential customers. Advertising sales agents use e-mail to conduct much of the business with their



Calling clients to obtain new accounts is important to an advertising sales agent’s success.

clients. Use of e-mail has considerably shortened the time it takes to negotiate a sale and place the ad. Sales agents may accomplish more in less time, but many work more hours than in the past, spending additional time on follow-up and service calls.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Some employers prefer applicants with a college degree, particularly for sales positions that require meeting with clients. Courses in marketing, leadership, communication, business, and advertising are helpful. For those who sell over the telephone or who have a proven record of successfully selling other products, a high school degree may be sufficient. After gaining entry into the occupation, successful sales experience becomes more important than education when looking for a position. In general, smaller companies are more willing to hire unproven individuals.

Personality traits are equally important as academic background. Because they represent their employers to the executives of client organizations, advertising sales agents must have excellent interpersonal and written communication skills. Employers look for applicants who possess a pleasant personality, honesty, and a neat professional appearance. Self-motivation, organization, persistence, independence, and the ability to multitask are required because advertising sales agents set their own schedules and perform their duties without much supervision.

Training takes place mainly on the job. In most cases, an experienced sales manager instructs a newly hired advertising sales agent who lacks sales experience. In this one-on-one environment, the supervisor typically coaches the new hire and observes as she makes sales calls and contacts clients. The supervisor then advises the new hire on ways to improve. To conduct more specialized training—for example, in selling to a particular market segment, such as real estate professionals or automotive dealers—the employer may bring in a consultant.

Advancement in the occupation means taking on bigger, more important clients. Agents with proven leadership ability and a strong sales record may advance to supervisory and managerial positions such as sales supervisor, sales manager, or vice president of sales. Frequent contact with managers of other departments and people in other firms provides sales agents with leads about job openings, enhancing advancement opportunities. In small firms, where the number of supervisory and management positions is limited, advancement may come slowly. Promotion may occur more quickly in large firms.

Employment

Advertising sales agents held over 154,000 jobs in 2004. Workers were concentrated in three industries: More than 3 in 10 jobs were in newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; 3 in 10 in advertising and related services; and 2 in 10 in radio and television broadcasting. A relatively small number of jobs were found in specialized design services, including industrial and graphic designers; printing and related support activities; computer systems design and related services; business support services; and cable and other program distribution.

Employment was spread around the country, but jobs in larger, well-known publications or radio and television stations were concentrated in big cities. Media representative firms also were concentrated in large cities with many advertising agencies.

Part-time employment of advertising sales agents was most common in advertising and related services and less common in publishing and radio and television broadcasting. Self-employment also was more common in advertising and related services. Overall, relatively few advertising sales agents were self-employed.

Job Outlook

Employment of advertising sales agents is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014 because of growth in population and advertising revenue. Rising demand for advertising sales agents also will stem from fast growth in cable systems and from the expansion of firms into the growing Hispanic market.

The industries employing advertising sales agents experienced considerable consolidation in recent years, and that trend is expected to continue over the next decade, although at a slower pace. This consolidation is not expected to affect employment of advertising sales agents significantly because prospective clients still will require sales agents to create and demonstrate advertising proposals. Technology has made advertising sales agents more productive, allowing them to take on additional duties and improve the quality of the services they provide, without substantially lessening overall demand. Productivity gains have occurred mostly in the accounting, proposal creation, and customer service responsibilities of sales agents, allowing them to provide improved services.

In addition to the job openings generated by employment growth, openings will occur each year because of the need to replace sales representatives who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Each year, many advertising sales agents discover they are unable to earn enough money and leave the occupation. As a result, job opportunities should be good, especially for those with a college degree or a proven sales record.

Advertising revenues are sensitive to economic downturns, which cause the industries and companies that advertise to reduce both the frequency of campaigns and the overall level of spending on advertising. Advertising sales agents must work hard to get the most out of every dollar spent on advertising under these conditions. Therefore, the number of job opportunities for advertising sales agents fluctuates with the business cycle.

Earnings

Most employers pay a combination of salaries, commissions, and bonuses. Commissions are usually based on the amount of sales, whereas bonuses may depend on individual performance, on the performance of all sales workers in the group or district, or on the company's performance. For agents covering multiple areas or regions, commissions also may be based on the difficulty in making a sale in that particular area. Sales revenue is affected by the economic conditions and business expectations facing the industries that tend to advertise. Earnings from commissions are likely to be high when these industries are doing well, low when companies decide not to advertise as frequently.

Median annual earnings for all advertising sales agents were \$40,300 including commissions, in May 2004. The middle 50 percent earned between \$27,740 and \$59,880 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,210, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$89,720 a year. Median annual earnings for sales agents in May 2004 in the industries employing the largest numbers of them were as follows:

Advertising and related services	\$44,900
Radio and television broadcasting	38,980
Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers	35,090

In addition to their earnings, advertising sales agents usually are reimbursed for expenses such as transportation costs, meals, hotels, and entertaining customers. They often receive benefits such as health and life insurance, pension plans, vacation and sick leave, personal use of a company car, and frequent flier mileage. Some

companies offer incentives such as free vacation trips or gifts for outstanding sales workers.

Related Occupations

Advertising sales agents must have sales ability and knowledge of their clients' needs and businesses. Workers in other occupations requiring these skills include advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers; insurance sales agents; purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents; real estate brokers and sales agents; sales engineers; sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing; and securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about advertising sales careers in newspaper publishing, contact:

► The Newspaper Association of America, 1921 Gallows Rd., Suite 600, Vienna, VA 22182. Internet: <http://www.naa.org>